

**REQUEST FOR INFORMATION  
TO PROVIDE CONCESSIONS AND GIFT OPERATIONS  
FOR THE CITY OF ASHEVILLE  
Western North Carolina Nature Center**



**Interested firms must respond to this RFI via mail by October 28<sup>th</sup>, 2016**

All questions concerning this Request for Information (RFI) should be directed to:

Chris Gentile, Director of the WNC Nature Center  
75 Gashes Creek Rd  
Asheville, NC 28805  
(828) 259-8090  
cgentile@ashevillenc.gov

## **RFI OBJECTIVES**

This is a Request for Information (RFI) only and does not constitute a commitment implied or otherwise, that The City of Asheville will initiate a procurement action in this matter. The City of Asheville will not be responsible for any cost incurred by responders in furnishing any information.

This RFI is issued to conduct market research to identify firms capable of operations of the food and concessions operation at the Western North Carolina Nature Center. The object of this RFI is to gather information from qualified firms to operate our concessions and gift shop. The information collected through this RFI may be used by the City to develop future solicitation(s) to seek a firm to manage concessions and gift shop at the Western North Carolina Nature Center. After receipt of responses to this RFI, meetings may be scheduled by the City to review/discuss the information received.

Responders to this RFI are not required to adhere to rigid guidelines or formats and are encouraged to offer creative solutions.

## **1. INTRODUCTION:**

The City of Asheville, North Carolina, requests information from parties interested in operating the concessions and gift operation at the Western North Carolina Nature Center. Information from prospective management companies should detail their qualifications and outline a plan of work for the management of the concessions and gift operation. The City of Asheville is looking for a firm capable of handling all operations associated with concessions and gift.

The Western North Carolina Nature Center is an accredited member of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) and is located within a mile of Interstate 240, Interstate 40, and U.S. Highway 70, making it an extremely convenient location for residents of both Asheville, Buncombe County and beyond.

## 2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

The Western North Carolina Nature Center is a 42 acre park owned and operated by the City of Asheville and features over 60 species of animals native to the Southern Appalachian Mountains. As the only AZA accredited zoo or aquarium within 80 miles of Asheville, the Center has seen substantial growth in both attendance and operating budget over the past 5 years. In 2015 the Center welcomed over 120,000 guests and is on track for close to 130,000 in 2016. According to a March – May 2016 survey, the average length of stay for guests is approximately 80 minutes.

Following is the monthly breakdown of visits in 2015:

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
3,980	3,257	9,713	14,155	14,229	14,043	17,680	14,350	8,197	9,572	6,221	6,581

### Current State:

Currently, the Center has three areas dedicated to concessions and gift operations

- A 200 square foot indoor space in the form of an historic 1800's cabin and
- A 165 square foot pentagonal deck (uncovered) with adjacent picnic tables designed for a food "cart" operation.
- A 200 square foot indoor (non-conditioned) storage building.

A new 230 square foot indoor and conditioned gift shop space will be included in the construction of a new front entrance expected to be completed in late 2017.

There are also 3 food/drink vending machines operated by a third-party contract through June 2017.

## 3. PURPOSE:

The purpose of this document is to inform interested parties of the information requested by the City of Asheville to potentially move forward with a Request for Proposals for management and operation of concessions and gift at the Western North Carolina Nature Center.

## 4. POLICY GOALS:

It is the intent and expectation of the Western North Carolina Nature Center to provide for its guests a quality concessions and gift shop service at a level comparable to other AZA zoos and Aquariums with similar facilities and attendance. To date the City has identified the following goals and challenges to be addressed by any concessionaire/gift shop management organization:

- Achieve revenue growth for the food and gift operation at the Nature Center
- Provide appropriate choices of food concessions that appeal to Nature Center guests
- Contribute funding for operations and to construct needed capital improvements and enhance facilities dedicated to the mission and vision of the Nature Center as outlined in the 2020 Vision Master Plan.
- Institute new marketing and sales initiatives and identify new potential customers.
- Create an on-line marketplace where gift items can be sold to guests via the website

## 5. INFORMATION REQUESTED:

Through this RFI the City is seeking information on the feasibility and desirability of entering into a management relationship with a concessions and gift operator that would address the goals outlined above.

Respondents should submit one original copy of responses to the list of questions below. Submissions must be marked **Western North Carolina Nature Center RFI** and received no later than 10 a.m., **October 28<sup>th</sup>, 2016**, by The WNC Nature Center, ATTN: Chris Gentile, 75 Gashes Creek Rd, Asheville, NC, 28805.

1. A brief overview of your organization.
2. Provide the name of a person identified as the CONTACT PERSON, his/her address, phone number and email address.
3. Provide the City with a general understanding of your organization and the services it provides, including:
  - Vision, objectives and management philosophy
  - Size and location
  - Number of years in operation
  - Career information on principals or key staff members in your company
  - Level of knowledge of the food and gift industry in zoos and aquariums.
  - Description of your company's approach to excellence in customer service
  - Financial status of company
4. Management Services
  - Provide a detailed description of the approach your company would take to achieve the goals as set forth in Section 4 of the RFI. Please specify if your approach would incorporate a lease arrangement or a management contract and why. Discuss how your company would be involved with capital investment in infrastructure under this approach.
  - Provide a proposed plan showing how your approach would be financially structured. This could be in the form of lease payments, percentage of sales, or other options.
  - Provide examples of how this approach has proven to be successful at other zoos and/or aquariums accredited by AZA.
  - Identify any other issues that require further discussion or analysis.
  - At the Respondent's option, provide any additional information not specifically listed above that might be relevant to the City's discussion.